DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 439 248 CE 079 862

AUTHOR	Haughey, Laurie
TITLE	Athletes Off the Field: A Model for Team Building and Leadership Development through Service Learning. Linking Learning with Life.
INSTITUTION	National Dropout Prevention Center, Clemson, SC.
SPONS AGENCY	Corporation for National Service, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1999-00-00
NOTE	39p.; Funded under a Learn and Serve America Training and Technical Assistance Grant.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Athletics; Citizenship Education; Educational Practices; Moral Development; Outcomes of Education; Peer Influence; Peer Teaching; Personality Development; Program Development; Program Effectiveness; Program Implementation; Resistance to Temptation; *School Community Programs; School Community Relationship; Secondary Education; Self Control; *Service Learning; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS	Character Education

ABSTRACT

This booklet provides step-by-step guidelines for developing a leadership-through-service-learning component for a school athletic team. It is based on a program called LIFE LINE (Leaders in Football and Education) founded in 1996 as a peer leadership group that would increase team unity and success both on and off the field. The guide summarizes the LIFE LINE experience, then sets out the following five steps for developing a peer leadership group: (1) choose a facilitator; (2) select peer leaders; (3) set up retreat plans; (4) train peer leaders; and (5) turn community service into service learning. The next section provides more information about the service learning model, including selection and planning of projects, the need for committed and ongoing action, maintaining the commitment of peer leaders, reflective writing, oral reflection, recognition and celebration, and suggested service activities. A list of four service-learning resources is included in the guide. (KC)

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Athletes Off The Field

A Model For Team Building And Leadership Development Through Service Learning

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Athletes Off The Field

A Model For Team Building And Leadership Development Through Service Learning

by Laurie Haughey

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Community service is a great way to help others. I feel that being a football player makes it my responsibility as a role model to children to be involved in the community. It benefits others, and it makes me feel good about myself knowing that I'm being of service to others."

–Student Athlete

Letter to the Reader

Welcome to another example of a great service learning opportunity! This guidebook represents my reflections on the steps that were taken in order to establish and implement Leaders In Football and Education (LIFE LINE), a leadership program for student athletes at Clemson University. The lessons from our experiences have been adapted to guide your work with student athletes, whether that be in middle school, high school, or college.

The youth of our country look up to athletes as role models. Unfortunately, athletic teams are not excluded from the ongoing social problems of contemporary youth. One can hardly pick up the paper without reading a new headline about the fallen heroes of athletics, and yet our nation's children aspire to be great athletes. As schoolteachers, coaches, and administrators, we impose many rules and guidelines on our student athletes, but we know that administrative protocols will be only partially effective. More than anything, we feel we need positive leaders within the infrastructure of the team—role models that can elicit more positive behaviors from the team as a whole.

Peer leadership groups can help develop outstanding young leaders, on and off the field. Young people involved in athletics have great potential to become leaders in their school and community with the right kind of guidance and support. Leadership opportunities for athletes can foster development of important values for their future.

By developing young leaders, we also can effectively diminish the negative effects of poor public opinion by redefining the group through positive, visible, and personally rewarding community outreach projects. This measure is important to maintain good public opinion of athletics in general; however, *it is vitally important to the student athletes whose personal opinion of themselves is largely formed by the community surrounding them.*

Our peer leadership program was based on the foundation of community service which eventually evolved into service learning. We felt this was the best way to integrate the needed leadership skills

which we were trying to develop in our athletes.

All LIFE LINE's service learning projects involved children—our group of student-athlete leaders felt that they could most impact children. Most members could recall the influence an athlete had on them during their childhood years. Our football players found service to children very rewarding, and their reflective writing shows it!

I wish you success as you attempt to implement a peer leadership, service learning program with your athletic teams. As an academic institution, you will reap many rewards, but your students will gain much more. They will find the opportunity to become trained leaders by practicing the leadership skills critical to their future success in the new millenium.

Laurie Haughey

The Purpose of This Book

There are certainly many reasons to support community outreach projects, and many sports teams already have an ongoing service commitment. Often, keeping good public relations is the driving force, while many coaches believe that community service is good for young people.

Whatever reasons motivate your community outreach projects, this guidebook will help you in a variety of ways by:

- supplementing your efforts to help your student athletes develop leadership skills, team building, and civic responsibility
- discovering ways to help your student athletes learn how to be leaders "off the field" which will also enhance their leadership skills during practice and competition
- helping you set up a peer leadership program for your sports team irrespective of the students' age levels

"As a head football coach, I welcome the opportunity to give my players a chance to develop their leadership abilities both on and off the field. By getting involved in solving community problems, our student-athletes have contributed to our community while at the same time they learn how to be effective leaders. Service learning can give you a winning approach to the positive development of the young people on your team."

—Tommy Bowden
Head Football Coach

Your athletes will be empowered to plan their service to the community as well as reflect on their contributions in a meaningful way. Most importantly, this guidebook will help you integrate the characteristics of service learning into your team's community service program or begin one if you don't have such a program.

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The LIFE LINE Story

Leaders In Football and Education (LIFE LINE) was founded in 1996 as a peer leadership group that would increase team unity and the team's success both on and off the field. We felt that many of the positive leaders on our team could have a greater impact on their peers if we structured a leadership component outside of football.

As their academic advisor, I became the facilitator of LIFE LINE. School personnel handpicked the original twelve members of the new leadership group. As each of the adults had different perspectives of these students, the selection process was more broadly based. Each member had exhibited leadership qualities through football or academics or both. Meetings, which we called "retreats," were held monthly, with a different student serving as leader each time. During the first meeting, members determined their mission statement and set up a list of values and commitments. This proved to be a critical step in maintaining the forward momentum of the group.

The many goals and values of each LIFE LINE member are reflected in the group's mission statement:

> *We seek to act as a peer leadership unit within the larger group of our football teammates. We strive to shape a positive team image and provide opportunities to strengthen team unity while we learn to become more effective leaders. It is our duty to promote sound decision making by all members of our team and to encourage community outreach projects.*

The only agenda item of the first meeting was to reach a consensus about the range of LIFE LINE's responsibilities. The membership was asked to refine the first draft of a mission statement. This allowed for dialogue about the ongoing commitment of members by clarifying what projects LIFE LINE would involve itself with while respecting its members' time constraints. Although each peer leadership group will have different priorities, at first we decided to turn our attention to the team. We needed to provide intra-squad leadership prior to getting overly involved in community outreach projects.

We felt it was very important for our peer leaders to voice their opinions. Our group had determined its own mission statement and felt a sense of attachment to both the processes of leadership and the newly developed agendas leadership which required of them.

Of equal importance to us was our need to involve each member in every aspect of the leadership role. As administrators, we often instinctively assume a leadership position. Peer leadership necessitates the principle that the membership will determine its own mission and, for the most part, will be self-governing. In the case of LIFE LINE, I was constantly rewarded by my attempts to remain an objective observer. Only by promoting the group's self-governing status was I able to witness the budding maturity, wisdom, and leadership our youth possess. Once our group determined its values and mission statement, we distributed them to the members, and this source was readily available as a reference thereafter.

LIFE LINE became the coordinator of community service activities by the team as a whole. As the program progressed, community service evolved into service learning as student athletes played a greater role in project selection. In addition, a reflection component was added to deepen the learning taking place. Finally, our recognition and celebration of our student leaders and their roles in the community completed the service learning framework.

Our efforts have resulted in the development of leadership skills in our student athletes. Their impact on their teammates has created an environment where negative behaviors have decreased. More importantly, positive service learning experiences are becoming the norm where our athletes are actively becoming good role models for children.

Five Steps to Developing a Peer Leadership Group

There are five steps that you can follow to establish a peer leadership group like LIFE LINE.

Step One: Choose a Facilitator

The Role of the Facilitator

Every peer leadership group will need a facilitator, a responsible adult who will coordinate the program. Though a quiet and unassuming position, the role of the facilitator is a critical one.

The first facilitator should attempt to make the name of the group as memorable as possible. Ideally, the group needs a name that offers new members an immediate impression of their duties. Also, the name must carry clout! Peer groups are important, so facilitators should not be afraid to make their groups' name impressive.

Although it required a substantial amount of work, I found that the role of facilitator was one of the most rewarding aspects of my job. Your facilitator may delegate many of the duties, using the adage, "If a youth can do it, an adult should not." However, the facilitator is responsible for the smooth operation of a peer leadership forum. Following is an account of some typical duties.

- Selecting inaugural members
- Setting meetings/retreats
- Establishing which member will lead the retreat
- Sending reminders of upcoming meetings
- Securing food and beverages/gaining sponsorship
- Securing trainers and guest speakers
- Serving as liaison to community outreach personnel
- Establishing outreach projects
- Getting media coverage

Choosing Your Peer Leadership Facilitator

The selection of the facilitator is vitally important. Take the necessary time to select wisely. To make the best selection of your group's facilitator, consider the following traits that he or she should have:

- Trust—The facilitator must be trusted by the student athletes. The mission is to establish a trusting environment where discourse is open and free.
- A self-effacing personality—The spotlight and rewards should be imparted on the group and not on the facilitator.
- Good listening skills
- Patience—Maturity and leadership do not sprout overnight. They are learned.
- Ability to delegate duties
- Advanced supervisory skills
- Significant organizational skills
- Advanced communication skills
- Superior time management skills
- Significant time to commit to this project
- An entrepreneurial spirit—Developing a new project takes vision and a willingness to travel into uncharted territory.

Choosing your facilitator by using the model above could be a daunting task. Please note, however, that I served the role of facilitator without all of these listed traits. These traits are offered as the *ideal model*. As you are selecting your facilitator, keep in mind that if you choose someone who is willing to work on these skills (as I was), you will be rewarded with a better employee or, if a volunteer, a school supporter, in the process!

Caution! Do **not** choose someone who wants to dominate the discussion through lectures to the group. This could potentially stifle the democratic discussion needed for real leadership to surface. If your group is to be successful, it will be because each member gains leadership skills while having to practice the role of leader. Also, do not choose a coach whose familiarity with the student athletes jeopardizes the ability of the members to speak freely.

Step Two: Select Your Peer Leaders

Initial Selection

We tried to remember that leaders come in all shapes and sizes and may not yet exhibit leadership in all facets of their lives. However, as our goal was to have leaders who are respected by their peers, we selected students who were leaders among their age group and not ours!

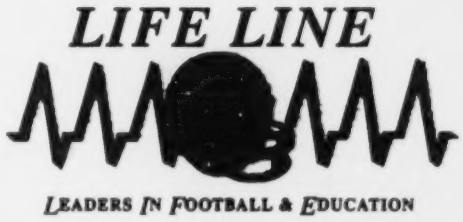
The ideal is to have a group of school personnel—teachers, coaches, counselors, and administrators—select the first group. This will make the task of selecting your inaugural group of peer leaders less onerous. Although your peer leaders may be inexperienced upon selection, they will invariably become better leaders through training and practice and serve the larger purpose of infiltrating their peer group to evoke positive change.

In our program, with there being a large number of players on the football team (i.e., approximately 110 players), we opted to select approximately 15% of the athletes to be our first peer leaders. If you are planning to implement a peer leadership program with a smaller team, **all** team members would be involved as the peer leaders, and therefore no selection process would be needed. I would recommend that up to 20 students would be manageable, and if you had a larger number on your team, you would need to select a peer group with eight to 20 members.

The Democratic Model

After the program had been established, we had the peer leaders nominate replacements. Nominees were invited to the next monthly retreat to see if they were interested in becoming peer leaders. (Not one nominee declined the offer!) The list of nominees was established, and voting by closed ballot occurred during the next monthly retreat. True to our legislation, new members were voted in by three-fourths of the voting members present at the retreat. As the facilitator, I did not vote and merely served to ensure a fair election process.

As the popularity of our group grew, it became necessary to establish the positions of president and vice president. In fact, our president was an Architect major who designed LIFE LINE's logo that appeared on all letterhead, thank you cards, shirts, and certificates. As the group grew, it became necessary for me to receive ongoing assistance from the president and vice president. It was also another step in these two student athletes' leadership development. However, in the initial years of the group, the roundtable approach was very effective at establishing the democratic style of dialogue that structured our meetings.



LIFE LINE logo designed by Michael Allen, Clemson '99

As each original member graduates and you face the prospect of replacing him or her, I recommend two ways to select replacements: The existing peer leaders may select the new leaders through a vote, or your entire team could vote on new members. The advantage of having just the membership vote on replacements is that, as a group, they understand the demands of the role. Each time that a new group is formed, have your members make a formal announcement to the entire team. Every effort should be made to show the larger population that the members represent the entire team and are not an exclusive club.

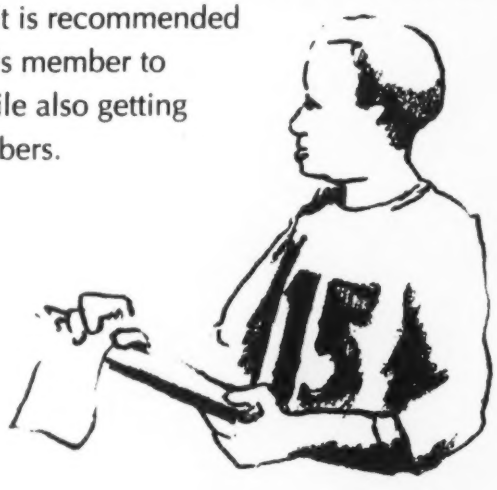
Step Three: Set Up Your Retreat Plans

Selecting a Meeting Date and Location

Each month, your peer leadership group should meet to plan future events, discuss problems or issues, and decide on training opportunities for themselves and the team as a whole. Calling each meeting a retreat will encourage more participation. First, for the members a retreat sounds more important than a meeting. Secondly, you set a tone of trust and responsibility. Retreats should be set up so most students can attend. Look at the team's travel schedule and other school activities to schedule a good day or evening to hold the meeting. As for the location, the facilitator should attempt to get away from the student athletes' typical surroundings, finding a local meeting space that everyone can get to easily. It is also recommended that the group use this location consistently to avoid confusion. The facilitator should make sure that the space is available while setting each retreat.

Retreat Leaders

I recommend having a different member volunteer to lead each monthly retreat. As it is our intent to build leadership, adding this responsibility will encourage and build on each member's ability to lead. Once this is determined, it is recommended that the facilitator meet with this member to establish the retreat agenda while also getting input from the other team members. A sample agenda is provided.



Sample Meeting Agenda - September

Meeting directed by _____

1. Sign thank you notes to sponsoring restaurant and last month's trainer
2. Dinner
3. Freshman sponsorship—Update
4. Topics to focus on with sponsored freshmen
5. Set up voting procedures for new LIFE LINE members
6. October's service learning project
7. Team issues
8. How we can improve our team
9. Vote changes in LIFE LINE constitution's by-laws next month
10. Direction of LIFE LINE for next six months
11. Next meeting—bring a guest, another teammate, to the retreat

Retreat Reminders

Since the ideal is to have every member present, I recommend that the facilitator broadcast the retreat several ways. Do not rely on word-of-mouth or a general announcement. I recommend using all of the following methods:

- A letter detailing which member will lead the retreat and a list of agenda items
- A posted announcement in the locker room or another centrally located place
- An e-mail to each member
- A "phone tree" where members are responsible for calling each other

Some Special Extras

There is no better way to tell a member that he or she is important to the organization than to offer a great meal! Surprisingly, it is very easy for the facilitator or student leaders to get restaurants to provide a gratis meal for your group. He or she may have to arrange a different restaurant each month. Sometimes, however, one restaurant will take on the full responsibility. Find ways to reward the restaurant owner. Listed below are just a few suggestions:

- Send a thank you note with the players' autographs
- Offer a free advertisement in the school yearbook
- Send the owner the team's t-shirt
- Invite the owner to the team's next home game

Keeping Minutes

The facilitator must keep accurate records of the group's activities and the minutes of each retreat. The minutes should be distributed to each member following each retreat. This is a task that may be delegated to a student.

Step Four: Train Your Peer Leaders

All good leaders have been trained, and peer leaders are no exception. Training can be incorporated into your retreats, or a separate time can be found.

I recommend setting aside a segment of each monthly retreat to discuss how to cope with issues affecting the school population as a whole. Training in conflict resolution, drug education, and negotiation skills is a must for leaders of any age. I also recommend using diagnostic inventories such as the Meyers-Briggs or Winning Colors© to illustrate the diverse strengths of the group. Your school counselor can offer a vast array of tests.

During the first few months that your group is established, I would highly recommend a trust-building activity such as the ropes course offered at local recreation facilities. Other activities that serve the same purpose of building trust are mountain hikes, overnight camping trips, and whitewater river excursions.

The facilitator and the student athletes should canvas all the contacts they may have in order to locate individuals who can serve as leadership role models. Finding such role models in the local community can be quite easy. Students' parents represent a cross-section of the general public's job occupations, and they can be approached to assist your group. Community leaders in local government, service organizations, and industry will likely help also.

LIFE LINE members received three or four training sessions each year. These training sessions were conducted by the town's mayor, local entrepreneurs, and college professors. Below is a list of some or our training topics:

Reflective Thinking and Writing

An English professor with years of experience teaching reflective writing gave a detailed account of how to write reflective responses to community outreach projects.

Proper Role Modeling

The Mayor offered insights into how important a student athlete is in shaping the local community's youth through proper role modeling.

Career Guidance

Career and guidance counselors discussed career potential with the peer leaders, thus heightening their concern for career fulfillment and encouraging a higher percentage of participation at the resumé-building and interview skills seminars hosted for all student athletes.

Conflict Resolution and Negotiating Skills

A speech and communications professor tested each peer leader on his conflict resolution style and offered particular skills that could be applied immediately.

Entrepreneurial Skills

Two local business leaders discussed the leadership skills that it takes to become successful in business and the benefit of giving back to the community.

The Mission of Building Team Unity

It may sound ironic to integrate team-building experiences into your training program for your student athletes, but for this specific group of students to work together **off** the field, you may find that it is extremely important. Particularly on large teams such as football, baseball, or track teams, the time spent in competition and practice is not enough to solidify a true team unity. Also, the act of creating team unity is often hampered by these very activities themselves. Each position works out with its position coach. What are some things that can be done to fully develop the team component for these peer leaders?

Peer Mentoring.

It is not unlikely that a senior would not know a freshman—particularly if one plays on offense and the other plays on defense. I recommend that each peer leader be a mentor for one or two freshmen players. Our peer leaders were responsible for assisting the freshmen's transitions and answering questions they might have. By getting to know the freshmen and helping them make the transition to college life and college athletics, the upperclassmen strengthened team unity.

Transitions at all stages of schooling can be difficult. Providing upperclassmen as mentors—whether 8th graders for 6th graders, 11th or 12th graders for 9th and 10th graders, or college seniors for freshmen—can be a vital leadership opportunity for your student athletes and a great team builder.

Community Outreach Projects.

Participating in service projects together can do much to solidify the team unit. As a team-building activity, involvement in community service serves to

- motivate the team to achieve common goals
- offer each member of the team another reference point to know and understand his or her teammates
- create a positive team image by promoting the entire team's efforts in the community

Ongoing community service projects that included the entire squad became LIFE LINE's major team-building activity. On these many occasions, the players came together to work with youth in the local community. Their associations with each other off the field prompted longstanding friendships. But more importantly, while out in the community, each member was viewed as part of a team doing a team activity. Community outreach projects became another point of reference in the players' familiarity with each other.

Step Five: Turn Community Service Into Service Learning

Since the beginning of its existence, LIFE LINE has been able to involve the entire football team in one outreach project each month of the school year. However, two years ago, we introduced the philosophy of service learning into our outreach projects, and the rewards have been many. Until LIFE LINE members were given service learning opportunities, they failed to see how they were gaining valuable leadership experiences during the activities. Involvement in service learning has enabled the LIFE LINE program to more successfully develop the leadership skills of its student athletes.

Prior to assuming the service learning model, student athletes were very visible doing work in the community. Members of LIFE LINE wanted to move past the "photo op" stage and get involved in several projects on an ongoing basis. I thought this showed considerable leadership! Our group was ready for service learning and began to follow the service learning model to complete each project:

- Selection and planning of project
- Committed and ongoing action
- Reflection through response writing
- Recognition and celebration

"As an organization, Life Line pulls together for the good cause of helping little kids have fun."

–Student Athlete

"I get a sense of self-satisfaction when doing community outreach projects. They also give the entire team both a positive outlook and a positive image."

–Student Athlete

Moving from community service to service learning is a natural process. The service learning framework allows for you to integrate your curriculum goals into a meaningful service experience so that learning is truly enhanced by the service. In a peer leadership development program, your curriculum goals consist of a variety of leadership skills—communication skills, teamwork, conflict management, and development of group processes. Service learning provides the perfect vehicle for facilitating the development of these skills and capabilities.

Creating Service Learning Opportunities for Your Team

It is highly recommended that you encourage your peer leaders to organize the larger population of the team into groups doing community outreach projects. Ideally, you want the entire team's involvement. Community service projects are important for the people and organizations these projects assist. Although students will quite often give freely of their time with no sense of reciprocity, as administrators and teachers, we need to encourage our students to gain more from their community service. You can turn your community service projects into service learning projects by having your group follow these steps:

- **Selection and planning of project**—The group forms a consensus on what the project will be, plans every stage while considering the project's time, cost, effort, and possible outcome or rewards.
- **Committed and ongoing action**—The group commits the time, money, and effort needed to complete the project.
- **Reflection through response writing**—Each member of the group writes his or her impressions of what the project was, how it impacted the community, and what impressions it left on him or her.

- **Recognition and celebration**—The completion of the project is celebrated at a party, dinner, dance, reward ceremony, etc.

If the service learning model is not adopted, student athletes may still be very visible doing their work in community service. But if student athletes move past the "photo op" stage, it will be rewarding for both the community and the student athletes. Ongoing commitment to a project is the key to meaningful reflection for the student athletes. Good public relations will result, but this is not the goal of your peer leadership program—positive youth development is your goal.

The Service Learning Model

Selection and Planning of Projects

During each monthly retreat, the members of LIFE LINE selected community outreach projects for the next few months. Selecting and planning the community outreach projects consumed a great portion of each retreat. First, the group came to a consensus on which project would be selected. The facilitator should find out the various organizations that have unmet needs in the community and establish an ongoing relationship with the directors of each organization. These contacts within the local community offered the group a number of ideas from which to choose. Due to the time constraints of our student athletes, we only selected outreach projects that could be completed within a four-mile radius of the campus.

Once the group arrives at a consensus and selects a project, the following issues should be discussed:

- Who will contact the organization? (Frequently this is the role of the facilitator who acts as a liaison with the nonprofit organizations in the community.)
- Find out what the organization needs and make a note of the days that are available for doing the project.
- Discuss how their needs will be met; planning should be the most time-consuming facet of any outreach project.
- When and where will the activity take place, and what rain date will be set, if necessary?
- How will the event be advertised to increase participation by all team members and coaches?
- Have each member offer a major contribution to the project—a graphic design student may volunteer to do the advertising posters, and a communications major may step up to make the team announcement or write a press release.
- Where will donated supplies come from, and what businesses and which individuals will be solicited as sponsors for the event?
- Discuss the name of the event, and make it catchy.

- Announce the event to the media.
- Make sure the project complies with all the rules that govern your program.

Committed and Ongoing Action

Once a project is selected and the planning stage completed, in an ideal group all members are going to step forward and become very committed volunteers during the action stage. However, this is not what happened in our group. Members did a very good job at advertising the outreach project to the rest of the team. However, on the day of the event, some members were absent and others were required to do double duty. At first, I found this very disconcerting. But all models are based on the ideal. I finally realized that there would be leaders within the leadership group!

We chose outreach projects that built on each other. For example, early in the semester, we planned a fund-raiser that would help us support the larger outreach project to be completed at the end of the semester. We found that the members enjoyed seeing the same group of students for a variety of events, and it kept their interest in their work.

As a facilitator, I was very busy during this stage. Even though I would be required to follow up, I attempted to delegate some of these duties to the members:

- Get donations. In the case of our group, members were not allowed to solicit donations, so this was a responsibility that I assumed.
- Create eye-catching posters to advertise the project.
- Advertise. Members informed the team both formally, during team meetings, and informally, when posters were placed in the locker room and dining hall.
- Coordinate all activities with the nonprofit organizations involved.
- Reserve the space and/or facilities needed for the event.

Maintaining the Commitment of Your Peer Leaders

There are many things that you can do to keep up the level of commitment to a project. Listed below are my suggestions:

- Try to choose projects with a clearly defined purpose.
- Choose area children from a local school or organization for service learning opportunities. Working with area youth is personally fulfilling and rewarding, and it will keep your team coming back. Quite simply, it makes your team members feel good because children are very impressionable, honest, and willing to share with your student athletes what it means to them to have them actively involved in their lives.
- Advertise. It is vitally important that you advertise each event to promote full team participation.
- Encourage your peer leaders to bring two or three other teammates to the event.
- Give your project a catchy, memorable name! Your team wants to know the event on which they are about to embark.
- Encourage each member to think about the service learning opportunity through reflective writing responses after the event.
- Promote the ideals of volunteer work as a resumé-building endeavor that will assist them in finding paid employment in the future.
- Invite television and newspaper media to the event.
- Solicit sponsors to cover the expenses of food, freebies, etc.

Reflective Writing and LIFE LINE

Our group received training on improving their reflective writing, and they were given information about why reflection was an important element of service learning. During the training, I recounted that a recent graduate had spent 75 minutes in his final interview with a company. Of this time, 45 minutes focused on his work in the community and LIFE LINE. At times, I would have the members fill out a one-page response sheet following a service learning activity. For example, after our Dress For Success Campaign, a fund-raiser to help abused children, I asked the members the following questions:

"I think that when you help out the community, you're trying to make it a better place."

–Student Athlete

"My best experience was seeing the smiles on the kids' faces at the ice cream social in the community center. The kids had to pick who was the strongest so he could dish out the ice cream. The kids chose me . . . I was the smallest receiver there and beat out our team's center!"

–Student Athlete

- What was the community outreach project?
- What made this particular project important to you personally and to the organization or individuals you helped?
- What leadership skills did you master?
- What is your plan of action with this group now?

Skills That Encourage Proper Reflective Writing for Your Peer Leaders

In order to encourage your student athletes to attain meaningful reflections from what they gained from their service learning opportunities, the following is recommended:

- Develop a one-page reflection sheet that each participant completes. This can be done on paper or by e-mail, whichever is easiest. Of course, you can ask whatever questions you wish to tailor to the event itself. Still, I recommend asking open-ended questions that solicit thought and reflection. Never use a question that can be answered with a "yes" or "no."
- Encourage each player to discuss what he or she did, how the organization was rewarded by his or her efforts, and what were the personal rewards the student athlete got for his or her service to others.
- Acquire proper training by experts in the field of writing.
- Gather these reflective writings on site to ensure full participation.

Oral Reflection

Discussion proved to be the easiest form of reflection for our student athletes. At each monthly retreat, our peer leaders would talk about the service experience of the past month, describing what happened, what it meant to them, and what they would do with this project in the future. They also brainstormed ways to involve more team members with the service activity for the next month.

Follow the reflection questions of What, So What, and Now What to guide your team's discussion of service experiences.

- What?—Describe the service activity, the people you worked with, the place where you served.
- So What?—How did this make you feel? How did this make the people you worked with feel? Was this a good experience for all? Describe how you feel about this experience. How did this develop your leadership skills?
- Now What?—What can you do differently next time? What worked and what didn't? How can we get others involved? How can we get community support?

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Recognition and Celebration

Yet another important facet of service learning is providing recognition to the participants. Praise for their commitment, leadership, and teamwork helps to promote their future service to their communities. As the facilitator, I kept the news media informed of each community outreach project. I also carried a camera for still shots and often would get professional video teams to cover the events. Articles were carried in the local and school newspapers.

In April of each year, we had a celebration dinner and distributed shirts with the LIFE LINE logo. Typically, the head football coach would be present on this occasion.

The celebration of your peer leaders' efforts is very important. Listed is just a sampling of the many ways these student athletes may be recognized:

- Schedule an award's dinner—Offer awards for the Most Committed, Best Trouble-Shooter, Best Problem Solver, Most Creative, etc. Have the dinner sponsored by a local caterer or take on the expense yourself if possible. Make it a memorable occasion!
- Arrange for full coverage by the media—The media may cover your peer leadership group throughout the year, but also offer them a comprehensive listing of all the work the group has completed at the end of each year.
- Give student athletes certificates of participation, plaques, etc.
- Have a joint celebration with the service recipients.
- Maintain an album or display of service experiences, using photos or reflective writings.

Suggested Service Activities

There are many kinds of service activities that can provide your student athletes with a positive, leadership development experience. Here are some favorites by our athletes in LIFE LINE.

"My best community service experience was when I helped with Habitat for Humanity. We poured the foundation for an elderly man's house."

"I get great enjoyment out of helping others. My favorite memory is the children's smiles during High Five Day."

"My satisfaction from community service comes from the smiling faces of the children we come in contact with. Assisting them with homework, reading to them, or just being a friend to them is my greatest joy."

"Community service is an opportunity to give back to the communities that helped us as children. I feel fortunate where I am today and enjoyed sharing my experiences with others."

"It's a great feeling to help someone that might not be as fortunate as you, whether it is reading to kids or putting playground equipment together. What you give to the community is irreplaceable."

Whatever you decide to do as your service activities, make sure that you pick memorable titles for the project. Below are some of our best service activities:

Dress For Success

This is an event that can be held during both the spring and fall. We held ours in conjunction with Career Week. Each member of the entire football team was sponsored with a financial donation by a community or faculty member to wear career dress while attending that day's classes. Not only did this function raise a lot of money for our charities, but we were also able to take advantage of the sports coats and ties to get great pictures! Pictures were taken at a plush office desk in our offices to complete the professional look. Our student athletes learned that day about dressing professionally. They also learned skills in goal setting as each time we did Dress for Success, we set our goal for a higher monetary donation for our sponsored organizations.

Engines That Can Day

During National Reading Week, the players traveled to local schools to read their favorite children's books to the children. Obviously, the day was entitled Engines That Can Day after the title of that wonderful book, *The Little Engine That Could*, which teaches children and adults that WILL leads to SKILL.

High Five Day

At the end of each semester, the football team sponsored High Five Day. We hosted two elementary classes for a movie, snacks, games, gifts, stories, and player autographs. The final event was a high five contest. The players judged a contest to see which child gave the team mascot the best high five. The child won a football signed and presented by the team's head coach.

Planting Seeds Project

Perhaps the most significant project that was initiated by this group was the Planting Seeds Project which involved starting a garden for abused children housed at a local children's shelter. The players erected a 72-foot fence, and they prepared the soil for the children to enjoy planting and learning the responsibilities and joys of gardening.

Conclusion

Developing peer leaders on your athletic teams by involving these student athletes in service learning experiences can be a rewarding experience for your students, your school, and your community. By developing an infrastructure such as LIFE LINE, the group's facilitator can focus on the leadership skills that athletes need, both on and off the field. When student athletes receive recognition for their community involvement and understand and value their own contributions as community members off the field through reflection, then a host of perceptions about themselves and their ability to give to their communities become positive and potentially life-changing.

Whether your student athletes are in middle school, high school, or college, leadership abilities that can be used **off** the field will be a major long-term benefit of their team experience. Build on the natural foundation that being on an athletic team provides by incorporating service learning and planned leadership development into your team program. We did, and our results exceeded our expectations!

Resources

If you would like to learn more about service learning, discover resources that will help you develop your program, or find people who can provide you with assistance, contact these organizations.

- Corporation for National Service
  Learn and Serve America Program
  1201 New York Avenue, N.W.
  Washington, DC 20525
  202-606-5000
  www.nationalservice.org

- Learn and Serve Training and Technical Assistance Exchange
  National Center
  National Youth Leadership Council
  1910 W. County Road B
  Roseville, MN 55113
  877-LSA-EXCH
  www.lsaexchange.org

- National Dropout Prevention Center
  Clemson University
  209 Martin Street,
  Clemson, SC 29631-1555
  864-656-2599
  www.dropoutprevention.org

- National Service Learning Clearinghouse
  University of Minnesota
  1954 Buford Avenue, Room R-460
  St. Paul, MN 55108-6197
  800-808-SERV
  http://umn.edu/~serve/

About the Author

Laurie Haughey attended Clemson University on a full track and cross country scholarship where she earned degrees in Sociology and English. She has over twelve years of experience working with student athletes in many sports. In 1996, she was asked to start a peer leadership group on the football team, and the first members of Leaders In Football and Education (LIFE LINE) were initiated.

"We have always had the leaders in academics and athletics," she contends. "Now we have a fully constructed environment that teaches the full range of leadership responsibility. Being a leader is not a self-serving endeavor. Being a leader means giving—being of service to others."

Laurie still works at Clemson University. She travels throughout the United States for the Office of Off-Campus, Distance and Continuing Education coordinating and hosting professional development for women conferences.

National Dropout Prevention Center

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Web site: http://www.dropoutprevention.org